Exercise Therapy for Patients with Heart Failure

The therapists at the Aurora Rehabilitation Center Department are proud to be part of the team caring for you. Our care is based on the principles of ACE (Acute Care for the Elderly). This means our goals are to help you become independent in self care and mobility, ensure your safety, and meet your psychological/social needs. Using the ACE concepts, we can help you function better and reduce the time you need to spend in the hospital.

Why exercise is important in treating heart failure
Heart failure means that your heart is not able to pump the amount of blood needed to meet your body’s demands. Regular exercise helps to increase your blood flow in order to feel better. Muscles that are out of shape make activities harder. The body has to work harder to meet its needs, which can lead to shortness of breath. Gradually increasing your activity and muscle strength, with the help of your therapist, will decrease strain on your heart.

Benefits of exercise
Regular exercise or activity can:
• Improve your appetite and mood
• Help you get more restful sleep
• Reduce stress
• Control blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes
• Ease the shortness of breath and swelling that are common symptoms of heart failure

Choosing activities
Choose things that you enjoy. Exercise can include activities such as walking, bicycling and use of a treadmill. Working with light weights to improve upper and lower body strength can also be helpful.

Getting started
Start slowly. Warm up your muscles by gently stretching and bending or by walking slowly. Make exercise a regular part of your routine.

Increasing your activity level
• Increase activity gradually. When you are able to exercise comfortably for 20 to 30 minutes, increase your speed, the number of times you perform an exercise or the total time spent exercising.
• Use pursed lip and diaphragmatic breathing to help control shortness of breath.
• A good rule of thumb is that you should be able to talk comfortably while doing the activity.
• On days you don’t feel as well, break your exercise routine into several shorter periods.
• Stop if you:
  – Feel dizzy
  – Have chest discomfort
  – Have heart palpitations
  – Have increased shortness of breath

Your physical and occupational therapist can help you design an activity program to meet your specific needs.

If you have questions, please call the Rehabilitation department at: ____________________________

The information presented is intended for general information and educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care provider. Contact your health care provider if you believe you have a health problem.
Aurora Health Care is a not-for-profit health care provider and a national leader in efforts to improve the quality of health care.